



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement Regarding the Death of Ms. Ogulsapar Muradova in Turkmenistan

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 21, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We in the United States were saddened and concerned to learn last week of the death of Ogulsapar Muradova, a journalist who was imprisoned in Turkmenistan. We wish to extend our deepest condolences to the family of Ms. Muradova for their loss.

The facts surrounding this case give rise to numerous concerns. This much we do know: Ms. Muradova was accused by the Government of Turkmenistan of illegal weapons possession. We cannot know the truth of that accusation or the evidence against her, because her trial lasted less than two hours, and took place behind closed doors. She was convicted by a court on August 25 and sentenced to six years in prison. Less than three weeks later, she was dead.

We call upon the Government of Turkmenistan to conduct an immediate, thorough, transparent and impartial investigation into Ms. Muradova's death. We also call upon Turkmenistan's authorities to be transparent regarding the cause of death and to make public the results of the autopsy they conducted.

This case highlights the lack of independence in the Turkmen judicial system, and raises concerns regarding the absence of due process in both criminal and civil proceedings.

Furthermore, this death in custody in Turkmenistan underscores the need for greater transparency and international access to Turkmen prisons and to persons arrested in connection with the events of November 2002. This would include our former OSCE colleague Batyr Berdiev, who has not been seen by anyone in the international community since December 2002. In the face of the death in custody of Ms. Muradova, we call on the Government of Turkmenistan to demonstrate that Ambassador Berdiev is still alive, as they claim, by allowing the ICRC to have access to him. The United States is confident our OSCE Center in Turkmenistan can help facilitate this process if the government is willing.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.